

## ***Areema Residents Association***

Areema is a beautiful estate with lots of green areas, trees and a moat where the majority of our residents are decent people trying to get on with their lives.

We are a struggling group of 12 who regularly meet with Housing Executive, Police, Council and DRD. We hold regular activities throughout the year for the residents of the estate: family day trips, pensioner days, a three-day festival in August, Halloween party and at Christmas Santa gives selection boxes to all the young children and hampers to the pensioners.

Unfortunately this year we had to cancel some of our yearly activities because of lack of funding and due to trouble from outside elements within the estate.

Being a mixed estate has its benefits, as the paramilitaries are not seen here. One problem we have is that Areema is on the interface area of Twinbrook and Dunmurray. The community teenagers and children are not welcome in "Catholic" Twinbrook or in "Protestant" Dunmurray so at the moment our main concern has been trying to fight through red tape to get facilities in our own area.

Our aims for the coming year are to succeed in securing funding for a number of projects which include a historic mural about Areema and the purchase of computers, sewing machines and tables so we can provide courses to residents both young and old.

## Consultation Workshop on "A Shared Future"

One of the first questions the consultation paper asks is about a vision for N. Ireland.

### 'What is your vision for N. Ireland in 25 years time?'

- All integrated
- Accept everybody
- Political parties will have working class people, will be playing for us and know our issues
- Less political parties
- Every party, however small will have "a say"
- Better, more suitable housing which will be affordable for everyone
- Poor people will have better opportunities and should be listened to and have influence
- Your "address" shouldn't matter
- N.I. will be cleaner (it was felt this was a council matter)
- There will be less cars and better public transport
- We will be looking after the environment
- We should have higher expectations - this was seen as a legacy of the troubles
- Mixed community will not be an issue anymore - as they will be normal
- Religion won't be an issue
- The community group continue to run with the next generation (though this will depend on good work and results now)
- There will be more respect for older people and the environment
- Politics will be different
- Areema will be brought back to what it was 30 years ago (greener)
- Church attendance will be down

## Overall aim of consultation paper

The group was asked if they agreed with the overall aim of the paper and if they had any comments about it.

All agreed that we should be working towards a more integrated society, The group felt that it was young people who would be the greatest influence here and that integrated education was one of the places to start

## Important issues

The document asks what the main objectives of the policy should be so the group was asked

### What are the main issues for you?"

- TO STAY MIXED- we hope this document can help
- The need to act now, sooner rather than later
- Areema was seen as a nice place to live together
- Protestants have been applying for and not been given houses in the area - no encouragement to help sustain the "mix" - the NIHE have a role to play in here
- There is a denial that Areema is mixed (among statutory bodies)One reason for this is that a single identity community is easier to police
- The group is unsupported in our efforts and in fact at times even blocked by outside agencies
- Group have been asked to take over services like cleaning in their area when this is not our responsibility
- We are fed little bits from agencies to keep us happy e.g. providing white lines on the road when we need speed ramps. They seem to want to keep us off their backs
- Doing statutory agencies work for them
- Traffic-calming measures
- Being able to voice opinion
- As a small mixed community we do not have enough votes to influence policy
- While in itself lack of paramilitary influence in the area is obviously positive this has resulted in other problems - anti-social behavior, and people being re-housed here who have been "put-out" of elsewhere

- As a mixed group we it is difficult to bring in political representatives from one side or the other as this could offend neighbours, friends or other committee members

### **What are some of the solutions? How can the government help?"**

- There should be a change in policy to support "mix"
- Legislation for integrated/mixed communities
- Concern over where council money and resources actually goes
- The group needs to be taken seriously which doesn't always happen at the minute
- Interagency meetings; those attending should have clout as at the moment they are attended by people with no decision-making capacity
- We need to be able to talk with senior officials about concerns
- Follow-up on promises
- Long-term support and resources needed

### **What support does the group need?**

- More local support
- Less rumours and bad press - other people's agendas
- Support from large local employers e.g. Makro and Tesco through sponsorship or environmental schemes
- Support from other mixed communities - we could work together as a body for change
- Learning from other groups success - sometimes even just meeting to talk with other mixed groups

### **Building on Current good practice - What works?**

For 40 years this has been a mixed housing estate - this has and is continuing to work

The group is 10 years old

The group support each other

The group *has* made a difference in the area

3-day annual festivals which include football, BBQ and disco

Christmas events for children and pensioners

Hallowe'en activities

All of the activities help local youth to get to know the group and appreciate their efforts